

3-21-2011
HB 152**House Bill 152 - Revise proof of residency and identification requirements for voting**

March 21, 2011

Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Olivia Riutta and I am the Outreach Director of Montana Women Vote (MWV). MWV is a coalition organization that works to register, educate, and mobilize low-income women voters. We stand before you today in opposition to HB 152 because our voting system is sound and this change is unnecessary, and it effectively creates economic, physical, and bureaucratic boundaries to voting.

HB 152 will strip away voting rights by requiring us to be card-carrying Montanans.

- Bill will require a current state ID or driver's license. While most of us here likely have a license, there are scores of Montanans who don't have one and don't want one.
- How do you get one? Must apply at the driver's license office and this is likely not a huge problem if you live in City of Billings, with more convenient hours and there is public transportation.
- This is a problem if you live in Browning and even more inconvenient if you live in Malta.
- If you happen to be lucky enough to live in beautiful Madison County (or one of nine other counties), you don't even have a driver's licensing office. For example, Virginia City may have been our territorial capitol, but to get an ID or license, you are driving over an hour to Dillon. And even if you have Thursday or Friday off of work, you are out of luck because the Dillon driver's licensing office is only open M-W. And don't forget to first pay at the Beaverhead County Treasurer beforehand and bring your receipt because the driver's licensing folks aren't taking your money.
- Most driver's licenses are valid for 8 years and once you have the license and you live in a rural community, you can renew through the mail, but only every other time.
- That is just the challenge of getting to the office, there is the economic barrier:
 - o Most Montanans get a driver's license that is valid for 8 years and costs \$40.50.
 - o An ID is \$8 and is valid for 4 years.
 - o There is not a state system or program to cover the cost of either. In some places like in Missoula, the Salvation Army can sometimes help cover those costs, but not always.
 - o \$40.50 is an economic barrier to many Montanans, and \$8 is still a barrier especially those who are on a fixed income, who are low-income, or are homeless.
 - o And again, this doesn't include the cost of getting across town, the county, or even over the county line as I have already outlined.
- This is just the cost of getting to the office and paying the fee, what about those who need to acquire the required documents to get the license or ID?
 - o Driver's license requires that you provide two documents, either two primary, or one primary and one secondary. One of the primary documents used is often a birth certificate:
 - o If you were born in Montana a birth certificate is about \$12 and would take 2-3 weeks with their currently volume.
 - o I was born in Michigan and to obtain a birth certificate it would be \$36.00 plus a \$8.50 fee and that doesn't include shipping. I would have to have a credit card to pay.
 - o I haven't even gone into the documentation required to just get a birth certificate.

It goes without saying that the barriers will be even greater to those who don't have documentation because they are homeless, had a house fire, are victims of domestic violence, or if you lose your wallet full of your IDs and social security card.

In Missoula, there was recently a 5 hour resource fair called "homeless connect." In just 5 hours at this event, the event organizers helped 53 people start the process of getting state id and driver's licenses. 25 of those people were helped just with the first step of getting a birth certificate, 22 applied for state ids and six applied for drivers licenses. The organizers spent more than \$900 on fees to secure these documents. This event was great at helping people meet these needs, but it only happens once a year and of course not all communities have this kind of event.

Montanans value participation in our electoral system, free from economic, physical, and bureaucratic hoops. Urge you to keep those values in mind and vote no on HB 152.

Thank you for allowing me to share this information with you today.

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